



Date: March 23, 2012

To: Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee

Re: Support for An Act Concerning Domestic Violence (Raised Bill No. 5548):
A Mandatory Model Policy for Law Enforcement

My name is Andrea Dahms, and I am a staff attorney and advocate with the Domestic Violence Crisis Center. DVCC is a member of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and provides direct services annually to over 4,000 victims of domestic violence across seven communities in mid-Fairfield County.

Our agency is contracted by the State to provide court based victim advocacy in both the Stamford and Norwalk Courts. In 2011, these advocates provided safety planning services and advocacy in over 2,000 criminal court cases. Law enforcement was often the first point of contact each of our victims had with the criminal justice system. Recognizing that law enforcement plays such a critical role in the response of our communities to domestic violence, the DVCC strongly supports the proposed legislation to adopt and mandate compliance with the Statewide Model Law Enforcement Policy, as drafted by the Law Enforcement Response to Family Violence Task Force.

I had the great fortune to serve as a member on that task force, and the recommendations that came out of this diverse collection of stakeholders will have the greatest impact on the law enforcement response to domestic violence since the passage of the Family Violence Prevention and Response Act back in the 1980's. Components of this policy, including: the designation of a specialized supervisory officer to oversee each agency's response to domestic violence; the creation of policies surrounding property retrieval and enforcement of restraining and protection orders; and clarification of the laws and guidelines surrounding dual arrests, are all foundational components of a best practice law enforcement response to domestic violence.

The DVCC has seen firsthand how the implementation of such policies impacts a community. For several years now we have enjoyed a strong working partnership with the Stamford Police Department's Special Victims Unit. Upon the re-organization of that unit several years ago, these officers internally developed policies that are much like those recommended by the task force. They provided training and oversight with respect to the proper implementation of the policies. As a result, the dual arrest rate dropped almost 20% and the community's trust in law enforcement's ability to adequately respond to their concerns and keep them safe has increased tenfold.

A victim of domestic violence should be able to expect the same professional and appropriate response regardless of which law enforcement agency the crime is reported to. By passing the proposed legislation and mandating the adoption of the task force's model policy, the State goes a long way towards ensuring that consistent response. On behalf of DVCC, I strongly encourage you to adopt the proposed legislation surrounding the Model Policy, including the creation of the Family Violence Model Policy Governing Council, in its entirety.